

# Iowa Wildlife Action Plan

## What is a wildlife action plan?

Congress asked each state to develop a wildlife action plan, known technically as a comprehensive wildlife conservation strategy. These proactive plans examine the health of wildlife and prescribe actions to conserve wildlife and vital habitat before they become more rare and more costly to protect.

## Iowa snapshot

**Landscape:** At the heart of America's farmbelt, Iowa's agricultural reputation is reflected in a landscape of row crops and livestock. But bordered by two mighty rivers and hiding pockets of scenic hills, remnant grand prairies, prairie pothole wetlands and hardwood forests, the state holds an unexpected diversity of wildlife.

**Management:** In a landscape dominated by private agriculture, resource management on public lands is necessarily intense, and cooperation with private landowners is essential to preserving the state's remaining fish, wildlife, forests, waters and grasslands.



Kellerton View/IDNR

**Wildlife highlights:** Prairie-chickens boom in southwestern grasslands; brook trout flash in northeastern coldwater streams; eastern massasaugas sun on southeastern river floodplains; black terns hover above northern pothole wetlands; regal fritillaries forage in the western Loess Hills prairies; and one of the largest wintering bald eagle populations south of Alaska spreads out along Iowa's rivers every December to March.

## Iowa's planning approach

Iowa's Wildlife Action Plan constitutes the first-ever attempt at accounting and planning for the entire range of the state's wildlife—birds, fish, mammals, reptiles and amphibians—plus butterflies, freshwater mussels and selected other creatures for which information is available. The plan is habitat-based and focuses on meeting the needs of 296 "species of greatest conservation need," identified by experts and a



Weighing a bobcat/IDNR

*"Iowa's Wildlife Action Plan is a long-needed tool that provides the first thorough accounting of all our wildlife resources, stresses on habitats, and visions to promote sound conservation for decades to come. We eagerly anticipate working alongside our conservation, agriculture and business partners in seeing this plan secure an even brighter future for Iowa's wildlife"*  
—Jeffrey R. Vonk, Director,  
Iowa Dept. of Natural Resources

thorough screening process. It also aims to “keep common species common.” The plan presents six visions for the future of Iowa’s wildlife, with goals and multiple management strategies for each. Funding availability will determine which visions are implemented.



Bobcat/IDNR

### Primary challenges to conserving wildlife in Iowa

Iowa’s action plan identifies 4 statewide “high” and 8 “moderate” conservation issues and stresses to land-based wildlife and habitats. Habitat absence,

fragmentation, isolation and overgrazing top the priority list. Habitat loss and fragmentation reduce or eliminate critical wildlife across vast portions of Iowa. Agriculture has been the greatest historical cause, but suburban sprawl, road development, stream channelization and other human intrusions have accelerated habitat losses in recent years. Species that have declined

to near-disappearance include Greater prairie-chicken, regal fritillary (butterfly), Franklin’s ground squirrel and Iowa Pleistocene snail.

For wetland/riverine wildlife and habitat, 4 “high” and 10 “moderate” stresses and conservation issues surfaced. Top concerns include runoff, invasive species and loss of streamside/lakeside vegetation. Intensive agriculture and suburban developments allow runoff into the state’s waters. This adds excessive loads of silt and nutrients, and accompanying oxygen depletion, degrading aquatic habitats. Crawfish frog, slimy sculpin, Higgins’ eye pearly-mussel and spangled skimmer (dragonfly) all are species in trouble.



DNR Director Jeff Vonk unveiling new wildlife license plates/IDNR

*“The Iowa DNR has done a wonderful job of including its conservation partners in the crafting of the Iowa Wildlife Action Plan. We truly hope that the State Wildlife Grant programs will catalyze non-game wildlife conservation in Iowa in the same way that other great conservation programs like Pittman Robertson and Wallup-Breaux have done for hutable and fishable wildlife.”*

*–Leslee Spraggins,  
State Director,  
The Nature Conservancy  
in Iowa*

Wildlife	Total number of species	Species of conservation concern*	Threatened/endangered
Breeding birds	206	67	10
Migratory birds	199	18	1
Mammals	88	18	6
Fish	153	68	17
Reptiles & amphibians	71	31	19
Freshwater mussels	55	29	14
Land snails	8**	8	8
Butterflies	113	30	7
Dragonflies & damselflies	106	28	***
<b>Totals</b>	<b>999</b>	<b>297</b>	<b>80</b>

\*Each state is using its own criteria for this category. Iowa focuses on those wildlife species that are declining, are legally threatened or endangered, or for which there is insufficient information to determine their status.

\*\*Only T&E species of snails are included in the Iowa plan, due to insufficient information on Iowa’s snails.

\*\*\*No T&E status yet determined for Iowa dragonflies and damselflies.

### Wildlife highlights

Highlight habitats	Wildlife (examples)	Issue (examples)	Action (examples)
<b>Prairie/ grasslands</b>  <b>Ownership:</b> <b>Mix of public and private lands</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Greater prairie-chicken</li> <li>• Smooth green snake</li> <li>• Franklin's ground squirrel</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Habitat fragmentation</li> <li>• Woody encroachment</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create expansive grassland landscapes of 2,000 acres or more around a core of public land, to benefit grassland wildlife with great spatial needs.</li> <li>• Remove invading trees and shrubs, use burning, mowing and rotational grazing as primary management tools.</li> </ul>
<b>Forest</b>  <b>Ownership:</b> <b>Mix of public and private lands</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Veery</li> <li>• Southern flying squirrel</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Housing development</li> <li>• Clearcutting</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work with city and county governments to promote rural zoning and "smart growth" developments that reduce forest fragmentation.</li> <li>• Provide technical guidance to professional foresters, and technical/financial assistance to private forest landowners, to reduce size and scope of clearcuts.</li> </ul>
<b>Backwater wetland</b>  <b>Ownership:</b> <b>Mix of public and private lands</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Least bittern</li> <li>• Topeka shiner</li> <li>• Blanding's turtle</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Siltation</li> <li>• Loss of riparian (waterside) vegetation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Establish buffer strips of grasses, trees and shrubs along banks, by working with adjacent landowners and utilizing federal farm program conservation practices.</li> <li>• Fence shorelines to exclude livestock.</li> </ul>

### Recommended actions to conserve Iowa's wildlife



Researchers measuring grassland songbird nesting cover/IDNR



Native prairie wildflower production plots/IDNR

### Working together for Iowa's wildlife

The Iowa Department of Natural Resources invited more than 100 conservation partners to help create visions and strategies for Iowa's plan. Partners from wide-ranging interest groups participated, including The Nature Conservancy, Pheasants Forever, Iowa Farm Bureau Federation, Iowa Association of

*“The Iowa Wildlife Action Plan is about so much more than wildlife. By protecting and managing Iowa’s wildlife, we’re protecting our natural landscapes, our water quality, recreation, tourism and our state’s very identity. It’s an investment in our future—for all species, common and rare, wildlife and human—for all of Iowa.”*

*—Mark C. Ackelson, President,  
Iowa Natural Heritage  
Foundation*

Boone River critical habitat for rare fish and forest birds/IDNR



County Conservation Boards, Iowa Department of Transportation, Morningside College, Safari Club international, Iowa Audubon, National Park Service and the Iowa Prairie Network. A day-long

meeting assembled 59 statewide interest groups to recommend conservation priorities and strategies. Individualized presentations at locations throughout the state also reached many organizations.



Gladys Black Eagle Refuge dedication/IDNR



Red rock eagle roost/IDNR

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